

FALLS

There are many reasons a person falls. Falls can result in injuries such as fractures. Most of the time, falls can be prevented. Falls are also called "losing ones balance" and tripping. When someone is falling more often than usual, it is important to determine why this is happening.



SOME FACTS about FALLS

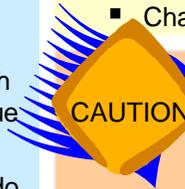
- People with mental retardation often have other conditions which make them twice as likely to fall.
- The following causes of falls can usually be prevented:
 - Poor balance due to *correctable* vision problems
 - Poorly fitted shoes or braces
 - Wet surfaces, or objects on the floor
 - Hurrying
- In other cases, the fall is more difficult to prevent, such as in the case of a seizure or when poor balance is due to new medication(s) or medical condition(s).
- After someone falls, they often move less since they do not want to fall again. However, muscles that are not exercised become weaker. As a result, more falls are likely to occur.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Sometimes, no one sees a fall and communication barriers can prevent learning about it. Look carefully for any of these signs that someone has fallen:

- Redness, for example "rug burn"
- Bruises or swelling
- Cuts or bleeding
- Expression or complaint of pain
- Not using or favoring a body part (due to injury)
- Change in behavior



PREVENTION

MOST FALLS CAN BE PREVENTED!

Take the following steps to help prevent falls:

ENVIRONMENT:

- **Remove** loose rugs, avoid slippery shoes
- **Put** things **away**, do not leave toys, books or other items on the ground or on the stairs
- Make sure paths and stairs are **well lighted**
- **Clean up spills** right away
- Make sure you **let people know** when the **floor is wet**
- Install **handrails** or **bedrails**, **lower bed**, and use **bath benches** or **shower chair**
- **Pad** sharp corners and edges

MEDICAL EQUIPMENT:

- Make sure **glasses fit** and are the right **prescription**
- Check the **fitting** of **braces and shoes**
- **Use prescribed equipment (canes, walkers)**

SELF CARE:

- **DO NOT RUSH** – take time to complete activities
- **Tie shoelaces** and don't dress the person in very baggy clothing or pants that are too long
- Ensure completion of an **exercise program** designed by the therapist to improve strength and balance



CAUSES

- **Rushing**
- **Seizures:** falls can occur both during a seizure, and after a seizure (if they are not fully recovered)
- **Balance Problems**, often due to:
 - medical conditions such as Cerebral Palsy, club foot, curved spine, different length legs
 - medications
 - changes in vision, ear infection, dizziness or headache
- **Environment:** objects left on the ground, slippery floors, poorly lighted areas
- **Self-Care:** untied shoelaces, baggy clothes, pants that are too long
- **Medical Equipment:** Poorly fitting glasses, braces, shoes etc...



WHAT TO DO

- **BEFORE MOVING THE PERSON**, make sure there are no apparent injuries
- Carefully record the fall: this will help explain bruises or pain that shows up later
- Use ice packs on bruises, and gently clean cuts
- If you can, fix whatever caused the fall
- Report the cause of the fall to a supervisor. They might be able to correct the problem and prevent future falls.
- Seek medical attention if needed (See "Call Your Doctor" section)



CALL THE DOCTOR

Call the doctor or nurse if:

- There are lots of falls (more often than usual for you)
- They are having a hard time balancing
- Falling occurs after starting a new medication or changing the dose of a medication
- A brace or other walking aid needs to be adjusted
- They have pain, swelling or bruising
- They are feeling weak and tired

WHAT NOT TO DO

- **DO NOT** move the person if they appear injured (unless they are in a dangerous place)
- **DO NOT try to move** the injured area or try to straighten it out



EMERGENCY

Immediately seek medical care if the person is:

- **Unconscious**
- **Gray in color**
- Has a bone sticking out or other signs of **fractures** (See Fracture Fact Sheet #12)
- In an **unusual position** (body and/or extremities)
- **Unable to move**
- In a lot of **pain** lying still or when they move
- Having **severe bleeding**



DOCUMENT

- Always write down **when** a fall occurs. It is important to record what **caused** the fall, what **was done** and what **needs to be** done to prevent future fall.
- File an Incident Report (if required) and complete other documentation such as writing down a description in the logbook if the person requires emergency medical care.



TO LEARN MORE - Go to these websites:

- http://www.ddssafety.net/newsletters/TheSafetyNet_Vol3.pdf
- http://www.ddssafety.net/families/preventing_falls.htm